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GERALDTON INC.

THE MERE MAN

A Farcical Episode in One Act

by
8 FEMMES.

HERBERT SWEARS

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MADE IN ENGLAND

CHARACTERS

THE PRESIDENT.
LADY BETTY (a Serious Girl).
DOLLY (a Lazy Girl).
MAISIE (a Blushing Girl).
IRENE (an American Girl).
MISS GOADSBY (a Girl no longer).
THE HON. MRS. RICKERBY (a Widow).
AMELIA (a Club Servant).

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"THEATRE 8"
GERALDTON INC.

THE MERE MAN

SCENE.—*The Drawing-room at the Emancipated Ladies' Club, 5, Chatham Street, Piccadilly.*

TIME.—5 o'clock on a bright May day.

The Drawing-room is luxuriously furnished. There are pretty screens, dainty hangings, silken curtains, seductive sofas and comfortable easy-chairs. There is a draped archway R. U. E., leading to further suites of rooms, and there is an opening L. 2 E. A fireplace with marble mantelpiece and high looking-glass is on the R. Below the fireplace a sofa with small occasional table above it. Tea-tables with chairs below the right upper entrance; R.C. at back; below the left second entrance and elsewhere, as may be required. The PRESIDENT'S table and high-backed chair L.C. at back. A sofa in the corner up L. A console table and looking-glass above the L. 2 E. Here and there small tables, littered with ladies' papers. Electric bell-pushes by the fireplace R. Hand-bells on each table. Water-bottle and tumbler, together with ink, pens and paper, on the PRESIDENT'S table. Flowers and palms, pedestal lamp, cushions, ornaments and oddments everywhere. Concealed out of sight an orchestra of strings plays softly at intervals.

If possible, at the rise of the CURTAIN a number of LADY MEMBERS should be discovered chattering and taking tea. Others should enter to them, smiling here, bowing there, and maintaining a buzz of conversation. There should be a clattering of cups, much laughter, and faintly, in the distance, the sound of music.

(Enter, together, LADY BETTY and DOLLY, L. 2 E.)

LADY BETTY. Wasn't the crush awful?

DOLLY. I'll never go to the Academy again, never—at least—

LADY BETTY. Well?

DOLLY. Not till John does my portrait.

LADY BETTY (*laughs*). Vain thing! I'm simply dying for tea, aren't you?

DOLLY. Ring the bell, there's a dear. I feel too utterly limp for anything—

(LADY BETTY *crosses to fireplace and touches the bell-push, and then slightly straightens her hat in front of the glass.*)

—and I'm sure I look a perfect fright, don't I?

LADY BETTY (*turning*). No, you look perfectly sweet.

DOLLY (*crossing to sofa and sinking down on it*). That's all right. I was afraid my nose was red. (LADY BETTY *laughs*.) It's really serious. I believe I've got indigestion.

LADY BETTY (*crossing and sitting beside DOLLY on sofa*). You're such a lazy thing. You don't take enough exercise.

DOLLY. I switch on the wireless. What more can I do?

LADY BETTY. Oh, lots of things!

DOLLY. I used to love motoring. Harry had such a ripping Panhard—

LADY BETTY (*reproachfully*). Darling!

DOLLY. What, dear?

LADY BETTY. You surely forget—

DOLLY. Where I am—yes, of course; it was very naughty of me, wasn't it?

LADY BETTY. Very.

DOLLY. We're both members of the Emancipated Ladies' Club, and we've solemnly promised never to marry—if we can help it. Do you know, I'm rather glad there's a loophole.

LADY BETTY. Loophole?

DOLLY. I mean it's nice to think we've only pledged ourselves not to marry—if we can help it.

LADY BETTY. Dear, I hope you're serious about it.

DOLLY. Rather! I know I've vowed all sorts of things—to ignore the Mere Man, to show him that he's an inferior animal, to uphold my sex, and all the rest of it. (*Pause.*) Betty dear!

LADY BETTY. Yes?

DOLLY. I'm not *really* serious—are you?

LADY BETTY. Er—oh!—well, I—

DOLLY (*laughing*). You old humbug, I *know* you're not.

LADY BETTY (*laughing*). Dolly, you're very naughty.

DOLLY. But tell me, how does the Club go on? There must be no end of resignations.

LADY BETTY. There *are* a good many. But, out of five hundred members, four hundred and fifty have given up marriage as a bad job. This Club is a harbour of refuge for matrimonial failures—a haven where the spinster of six seasons may safely establish herself, and goad at the man she has vainly sought.

DOLLY. Poor things!

(*Enter AMELIA L. 2 E.*)

LADY BETTY. Bring tea, please.

AMELIA. Yes, me lady.

LADY BETTY. Scones, please, and tea cake.

AMELIA. Very well, me lady. (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

DOLLY. Fancy our being emancipated, Betty—isn't it odd?

LADY BETTY. At school, I remember, we both decided to marry Ivor Novello, live in Berkeley Square—

DOLLY. And eat toffee by the ton.

LADY BETTY. Dreams of the past.

DOLLY. It's a pity men are so dreadful.

LADY BETTY. It *is*.

DOLLY. Because it might be rather fun getting married.

LADY BETTY. It might be.

DOLLY. After all, it's rather hard to keep giving presents to other girls, and never get any back yourself.

(*Enter AMELIA with tea-tray, L. 2 E.*)

Here's tea. Pour it out, Betty dear. I'm so dreadfully tired and rattled.

(AMELIA puts tea-tray on occasional table, and places it in front of the sofa.)

(Enter MISS GOADSBY, a frumpish fright of forty-five, and MRS. RICKERBY, much made up, with a golden fringe. MISS GOADSBY laughs shrilly as she enters.)

MISS GOADSBY. Did you decide on the pale blue toque?

MRS. RICKERBY. Yes, I think so; but I'm going again to-morrow.

MISS GOADSBY (to AMELIA). Bring tea, please.

AMELIA. Yes, ma'am. (Exit L. 2 E.)

(MISS GOADSBY and MRS. RICKERBY sit at table below L. 2 E., and talk in whispers with an occasional shrill titter.)

DOLLY (softly). I suppose those are two of the Club fixtures?

LADY BETTY. They're very severe on the Mere Man.

DOLLY. They look it. (Pause.) Betty!

LADY BETTY. Well?

DOLLY. I've something frightfully important to tell you.

LADY BETTY. What is it? (They whisper.)

(Re-enter AMELIA with tea, which she places on table L.)

AMELIA (to MISS GOADSBY). Beg pardon, miss, but the man says with extras his fare's half a crown.

MISS GOADSBY. Ridiculous! I'll never pay it. How dare he! Tell him if he doesn't go at once, I'll send for a policeman.

AMELIA. Very good, miss. (Exit L. 2 E.)

MISS GOADSBY. The impudence of these taxi-men!

MRS. RICKERBY. Yes, they're very trying.

MISS GOADSBY. Very.

MRS. RICKERBY. In fact, the only time I feel safe in giving the legal fare is when I come to this Club.

MISS GOADSBY. Why?

MRS. RICKERBY. Well, you see, I give the money to a Club servant. She hands it to the driver, who levels his abuse at her head—not at mine. I'm told there's more bad language used in Chatham Street than anywhere else in London.

MISS GOADSBY. You don't say so!

(Re-enter AMELIA L. 2 E.)

AMELIA. If you please, ma'am, the man's swearing something dreadful.

MISS GOADSBY. What did he say?

AMELIA. Oh! don't ask me, ma'am. I really couldn't. Two policemen fainted dead away, and I very nearly blushed myself.

MISS GOADSBY. Dear me! Well, it's an extortion. Still, I'll pay it. (Gives money.) There! Tell him I consider he's a low fellow.

AMELIA. Very well, ma'am. (Aside, as she exits L. 2 E.) Why don't she do her own dirty work?

MISS GOADSBY. I'm perfectly certain I'm right.

MRS. RICKERBY. Doubtless, dear. By the way, our monthly Presidential Meeting takes place to-day, does it not?

MISS GOADSBY. Yes, ^{Mrs. McCuire} ~~Miss Blunderby~~ takes the chair at five-fifteen.

MRS. RICKERBY. Do you think there are likely to be any resignations?

MISS GOADSBY (simpering). Oh!—oh!—don't ask me.

MRS. RICKERBY. Surely not you, Trixy?

MISS GOADSBY (shrilly). You mustn't ask me—you mustn't, really.

MRS. RICKERBY. Won't you confide in me? (They whisper together.)

LADY BETTY. So you're really engaged to be married?

DOLLY. Isn't it lovely?

LADY BETTY. I'm so glad. Where did it happen?

DOLLY. He proposed at Fuller's in Regent Street.

BRIGHT SPOT

* OCEAN DRIVE

He was so nice about it; I was eating an éclair and couldn't reply, because my mouth was full.

LADY BETTY. What did he do?

DOLLY. Pretended to brush his hat. Then, at the right moment, he looked up, and I accepted him.

LADY BETTY. He must be a dear.

DOLLY. He's the sweetest man in the world.

(A pause. LADY BETTY stirs her tea. MISS GOADSBY simpers shrilly; the ORCHESTRA plays a waltz.)

LADY BETTY. Dolly, I think—I think I ought to tell you something.

DOLLY. Betty, you're not——?

LADY BETTY. Yes, I am.

DOLLY. Engaged?

LADY BETTY. Yes.

DOLLY. Oh, what fun! Is he very nice?

LADY BETTY. He's just perfect.

DOLLY. How simply splendid! Tell me everything.

LADY BETTY. He proposed at the Bungalow in Conduit Street. *BOUTLERS 414 ROTUNDA*

DOLLY. How interesting!

LADY BETTY. I was eating a scone at the moment, and nearly choked. He was awfully considerate.

DOLLY. What did he do?

LADY BETTY. He choked, too!

DOLLY. He's perfectly ideal.

LADY BETTY. Isn't he?

(They continue to talk softly.)

MRS. RICKERBY. How romantic. So you are really going to be married, Trixy?

MISS GOADSBY (sharply). Is it remarkable?

MRS. RICKERBY. Oh! no—but tell me the story of his wooing.

MISS GOADSBY. It occurred at the Far East in Regent Street. We were in the small smoking-room downstairs. He looked like a comparatively young Greek god.

MRS. RICKERBY (shocked). My dear!

MISS GOADSBY (reassuringly). In all save clothing.

MRS. RICKERBY (relieved). Ah!

MISS GOADSBY. He offered me a cigarette—with a pretty blush I declined. He then whispered that if he offered me his hand and heart, would I be so obdurate? I smiled, and archly replied that I might consider the matter. I then hurriedly removed my left glove, and he squeezed my hand. And thus was planted the tender flower of love that will grow and blossom as roses do in June.

MRS. RICKERBY. I congratulate you. (Slight pause.) Trixy, I too have something to communicate.

MISS GOADSBY (surprised). Really?

MRS. RICKERBY. I had not meant to speak of it—indeed, nothing but the fear that you might consider yourself more fortunate than I now induces me to do so.

MISS GOADSBY. Tell me your heart's secret.

MRS. RICKERBY (promptly). I will.

MISS GOADSBY. Where did he propose? *GUILD TEAS*

MRS. RICKERBY. At the Marlborough-Tea-Rooms in Bond Street. These tea places are so convenient.

MISS GOADSBY. They are.

MRS. RICKERBY. I was devouring a portion of buttered toast, little dreaming of the avowal that trembled on his lips, when——

MISS GOADSBY. Yes!

MRS. RICKERBY. A piece went the wrong way.

MISS GOADSBY (compassionately). Poor thing!

MRS. RICKERBY. He acted like a knight of old.

MISS GOADSBY. What did he do?

MRS. RICKERBY. He slapped me on the back, and said he loved me.

MISS GOADSBY. Romantic boy!

MRS. RICKERBY. And that was how it happened.

(Enter IRENE and MAISIE L. 2 E. They cross to sofa R. LADY BETTY rises.)

IRENE (speaking with a strong American accent). Why, this is real nice. (Kisses LADY BETTY.) I'm that glad to see you. Ah, Dolly, lazy as ever. (Kisses her.)

DOLLY (*who is seated*). Can't get up. How are you, dear?

IRENE. You ought to hustle. I've been hustling all the afternoon—haven't I, Maisie?

MAISIE. Irene's a perfect whirlwind.

MISS GOADSBY (*to MRS. RICKERBY*). Who's the American person?

MRS. RICKERBY. Miss Van Hopper, the millionaire's daughter. The only one, I'm glad to say.

LADY BETTY. You're looking very blooming and happy.

IRENE. I guess I'm both.

LADY BETTY. Sit down and talk. (*Moves up c. for chair.*)

(IRENE sits beside DOLLY.)

MAISIE (*getting chair from up c.*). Irene, tell them.

LADY BETTY } (*interested*). What?
DOLLY }

IRENE. Well—

DOLLY. Go on. (*They are now sitting in a semicircle.*)

IRENE. Well, I've had a proposal of marriage.

DOLLY. Where?

IRENE. At Buszard's, in Oxford Street.

DOLLY. How romantic! Tell us.

LADY BETTY. Yes, do.

IRENE. There ain't much to tell. He said: "You're emancipated, ain't you?" I replied: "Why, cert'nly." Said he: "You'll just have to cease to be." "'Cos why?" I asked. "'Cos you're going to marry me," said he. "That's a bet," said I. And so I took another slice of plum cake, and the thing was fixed up.

DOLLY. How splendid!

(*Enter AMELIA L. 2 E.*)

AMELIA (*to MAISIE*). I beg pardon, miss, but the driver says his fare's two shillings.

MAISIE. Did you try him with eighteenpence?

AMELIA. Yes, miss.

MAISIE. What did he say?

AMELIA. Well, miss, he— (*Whispers in MAISIE's ear.*)

MAISIE (*shocked*). Oh! Here's the extra sixpence. (*Hands money.*)

AMELIA. Thank you. Dreadful, wasn't it, miss? (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

DOLLY. Maisie, you're blushing. What is it?

MAISIE. I can't tell you, really.

DOLLY (*rises, comes to MAISIE and drags her back to the sofa, and then sits on the arm herself*). You must tell us.

MAISIE. Well, he—

(*They all whisper together and laugh.*)

MISS GOADSBY (*to MRS. RICKERBY*). Can you hear?

MRS. RICKERBY. Not a word! It's most exasperating!

IRENE. Now then, Maisie, tell them your news.

LADY BETTY. Why, I do believe—

DOLLY. Yes, I do believe—

MAISIE. Well, I couldn't help it. It was at the Ceylon in Grafton Street. MAYFAIR TEARDROPS.

DOLLY. You needn't blush so.

MAISIE. I'm always blushing. It's very silly of me. But I can't help it. He said: "Do you like muffins?" I blushed crimson—it *was* silly, wasn't it? Then he said I looked rather nice when I blushed—he's *such* a dear—and then he said—oh!—a lot of things—and there it is, you see!

IRENE. Look here, girls, I guess there's going to be trouble in this Club. What will old Mother Blunderby say? *MACQUIRE*

LADY BETTY. She's bound to accept our resignations if tendered in the proper manner.

IRENE. And what's that?

LADY BETTY. We simply rise at the monthly meeting held to-day, announce the fact of our engagements—

IRENE. You're both engaged, too! My! There's going to be fun!

LADY BETTY. And hand his portrait to the President.

IRENE. But, why?

LADY BETTY. It's the rule. There's a room here devoted exclusively to such portraits. It is called the Chamber of Horrors.

IRENE. It's lucky I have his picture with me. My boy asked me to carry it in my purse—as a favour.

LADY BETTY.

DOLLY. } So did mine!

MAISIE.

IRENE. That's all right. Well, girls, we'll have to stick together and face the music.

MAISIE. Miss Blunderby always fills me with terror.

IRENE. Yes—she's a fierce-faced woman.

LADY BETTY. I shall be sick with nervousness.

DOLLY. It's awful to have to tell the truth.

MAISIE. Can't we run away?

IRENE. I guess we'll have to say it's Leap Year.

LADY BETTY. We must arrange something.

(They all talk together earnestly. MISS GOADSBY rises and coughs shrilly to attract their attention. They take no notice. MISS GOADSBY coughs louder.)

IRENE. The old cat's cough seems troublesome.

(MISS GOADSBY coughs still more loudly.)

Madam, let me recommend Johnson's Throat Specific—I guess it'll do you good.

MISS GOADSBY. Ladies, pray forgive me. I have unwittingly overheard your last few remarks, and if you are about to form an offensive or defensive alliance, I would be glad to join you. For I, too, have decided to marry.

IRENE (amazed). Oh! Sakes! You're joking.

MISS GOADSBY (sharply). I beg your pardon.

IRENE. You have my best wishes, ma'am.

MISS GOADSBY. My friend here, too, is—

IRENE. As well!

MRS. RICKERBY (demurely). Yes!

IRENE (astonished). Well!

LADY BETTY. There seems a perfect epidemic of marriage.

DOLLY. It's like the measles.

(An electric bell rings loudly. Enter AMELIA L. 2 E. She quickly crosses to R.U.E., and exits.)

IRENE. Well, girls, we're all decided on one thing, anyway.

ALL. What's that?

IRENE. We mean to stick to our boys!

MISS GOADSBY (emphatically). Certainly.

IRENE (wonderingly). Is yours a boy?

MISS GOADSBY. Of course!

IRENE (astonished). You don't say!

(Re-enter, quickly, AMELIA, R.U.E.)

AMELIA. Excuse me, ladies—Miss ~~Blunderby~~ ^{Mrs. RICKERBY} is coming.

(She moves the PRESIDENT's table and chair a little farther down, and arranges four chairs to right of it and two chairs to left of it in a semicircle, and then stands at attention just at the R.U.E.)

MAISIE (to DOLLY). I know I'm blushing.

DOLLY. I feel half dead with fright.

LADY BETTY. Miss ~~Blunderby~~ ^{Mrs. RICKERBY} is so formidable.

MISS GOADSBY. I'm trembling like an aspen leaf.

IRENE. Cheer up, old lady.

MISS GOADSBY (sharply). I beg your pardon.

IRENE. Let's get along with the work.

(They form in two lines on either side of the R.U.E. LADY BETTY, DOLLY, IRENE and MAISIE R.; AMELIA, MISS GOADSBY and MRS. RICKERBY L. The ORCHESTRA plays a stirring march, and the PRESIDENT slowly enters R.U.E. She is a terrific-looking lady, severe of feature, with iron-grey hair and gold spectacles. She carries official books and papers. She comes down a few steps, stops and bows. Everyone curtsseys.)

PRESIDENT. Ladies, pray be seated.

(MISS GOADSBY and MRS. RICKERBY cross and seat themselves left of the Presidential Chair. LADY BETTY, DOLLY, IRENE and MAISIE R. AMELIA remains standing R.C. The PRESIDENT crosses behind the semicircle of chairs to her table, at which she stands majestically.)

(NOTE.—During the PRESIDENT'S address the MEMBERS indicate, in various ways, their extreme uneasiness.)

PRESIDENT. It is not my intention this afternoon to dwell at any great length on the manifold imperfections of the reptile incorrectly classified as Man—on the scorpion, to give him his true name, ever crawling in our path, who endeavours, with malignant cunning, to ensnare us weak defenceless women into unsought and undesired matrimony. I need not remind you that it was to combat this, our hereditary enemy, that I formed the Emancipated Ladies' Club. It is with a feeling akin to pride that I am enabled to announce that the blow has struck home. Joined with me in this noble crusade, I find myself to-day surrounded by women remarkable for their beauty—

MISS GOADSBY (*coughing*). Ahem!

PRESIDENT. —remarkable, I say, for their beauty and great intellectual gifts, women who prove by their presence here that their decision to ignore the Monster Man is firm and unalterable. And yet, ladies, we are no conventual order. We go out into the world and mix freely with our fellow-creatures. I lay no ban on the theatre, the ballroom, the golf-links or the river. Our sole aim is to demonstrate, and demonstrate effectually, that Man is no longer necessary. He is superfluous.

We do not need him. We do not wish to marry him. Ladies, do I express your feelings correctly?

ALL (*nervously*). Yes, yes, yes.

PRESIDENT. I am glad. I did not for one moment doubt your loyalty, but your enthusiasm in the cause moves me, I confess it, very deeply. I feared there might be backsliders among you. I was mistaken. A shallow cynic once remarked that Woman sometimes changed her mind. This abominable calumny is now,

once and for ever, effectually disposed of. And I stand here to-day, ladies, happy in the thought that there is not one among us who is not determined, at all costs, to wage this noble war to its legitimate conclusion—in a word, till Man slinks beaten from the field. Is it not so, ladies?

ALL (*nervously*). Yes, yes, yes.

PRESIDENT (*majestically*). I knew it. If we were weak, if we were like our unhappy sisters—I refer to those of our sex not members of this Club—the present year might present some difficulties. I need not remind you that it is Leap Year—an occasion sometimes seized upon by abandoned females to make matrimonial advances towards Man. Such a proceeding, I need scarcely say, is disgraceful in the highest degree and calculated to inspire the Monster with an entirely false notion of his own importance. With these few prefatory words, ladies, I will proceed to the business of the meeting, that being to report progress, to take note of work transacted, to tender advice where needed, and to register the further victorious advance of Woman over the prostrate and grovelling form of Man. This also is the moment when any weak sister—should there be one—may arise, should she be unable to conscientiously serve beneath our banner, and state the same in the usual manner.

(*She resumes her seat amidst mild applause. Hurried consultation is held between the various characters.*)

(*Fixing her basilisk stare upon MAISIE.*) Perhaps Miss Maisie Haythorn will favour us with an account of the month's transactions.

MAISIE (*aside to the others*). Oh! How awful!

DOLLY. Go on, Maisie.

MAISIE. I can't be the first; you, Dolly—

DOLLY. No, no.

LADY BETTY. You must, Maisie.

MAISIE. I can't.

PRESIDENT (*in a voice of Fate*). I call on Miss Maisie Haythorn.

MAISIE. Oh! my goody! (*Rises.*) I know I'm blushing. It's very silly of me, isn't it?

PRESIDENT. I regret to say, Miss Haythorn, that my experience teaches me that a great many ladies blush who should not, and a great many *don't* blush who *should*. (*Mrs. RICKERBY giggles.*) I do not, of course, refer to those ladies who blush permanently and artificially. (*Mrs. RICKERBY glares.*) Pray proceed, Miss Haythorn. During the past four weeks you have, in the natural course of events, encountered Man in various forms, shapes and sizes.

MAISIE (*aside to DOLLY*). Dolly, you are horrid. You might help me out.

PRESIDENT. I was saying, Miss Haythorn, that you have doubtless seen and held converse with Man attired in the singularly unattractive fashion that is peculiar to him. You have met him in tweed suits, evening clothes, and in the strange garments he assumes when motoring.

MAISIE. Oh! I—I never notice what they wear.

PRESIDENT. That is *strange*. Tell me, Miss Haythorn, if a Being entered a ballroom attired in a dress coat and plus-fours, would not the singularity of his costume impress you?

MAISIE. I—I—I shouldn't look at them.

PRESIDENT. Such lack of observation, though, I fear, unusual, is much to be commended. (*Takes note in book.*) In regarding Man, then, what feature impresses you most?

MAISIE. His head.

PRESIDENT. What part of his head?

MAISIE. The top. (*There is a general giggle.*)

PRESIDENT (*reproachfully*). Ladies, please. (*Takes note in book.*) Why the top?

MAISIE. Because—because, if he's bald, I know he's good and plays the cornet. (*A general titter.*)

PRESIDENT. Ladies, I must beg you to be serious. The subject under discussion is not one to be treated lightly. This monthly interchange of views is, I submit, of the utmost value in guiding and shaping our future

course of action. Miss Haythorn asserts that Man, when bald and addicted to the cornet, may be regarded as comparatively harmless. Is that the general view of those present? (*MAISIE sits down with a sigh of relief.*)

Mrs. RICKERBY. I'm sure of it.

DOLLY. I know it.

LADY BETTY. I'm certain of it.

IRENE. I'll bet on it.

MISS GOADSBY. I'm convinced of it.

(*Spoken simultaneously.*)

PRESIDENT (*takes notes*). This unanimity is remarkable. Indeed, under the circumstances, one wonders why Man should continue to apply a hair restorer.

IRENE (*rising*). Let me make myself clear, ma'am: when I say bald, I don't mean a man with a head like a bladder o' lard.

ALL (*together*). No, no, of course not.

PRESIDENT (*taking notes*). You mean, I take it, ladies, an individual with an expansive forehead.

IRENE. That's so. I mean a man whose forehead stretches well back and expresses things.

PRESIDENT. Has anything occurred to influence your views in this respect?

IRENE. I guess something *has*!

PRESIDENT. Pray tell us.

IRENE. You see, it's this way. My poppa's a very straight man. His last advice to me, when I left for Europe, was not to monkey around.

PRESIDENT (*taking notes*). He referred, I presume, to the Zoological Gardens.

IRENE. No, ma'am. He meant, if you've got to tell a thing—tell it. That's what I mean to do.

PRESIDENT. An admirable sentiment, but, alas! only possible in a young nation where everything has not already been said.

IRENE. I'm glad you approve.

PRESIDENT. Yes.

IRENE. Because I'm going to marry a bald man.

PRESIDENT (*aghast*). Goodness gracious! Dear, dear, dear! Well, really! Excuse me, ladies, I—
(*Smells smelling-salts.*) This is most sudden.

IRENE. That's what I said.

PRESIDENT. Indeed!

IRENE. He said he'd heard the remark before.

PRESIDENT. Miss Van Hopper, I confess that your news is a blow to me. I regret your weakness. I regret that a good soldier should fall out of the ranks, but I presume that it is useless to urge you to change your decision.

IRENE. That's so.

PRESIDENT. Very well, then, I shall accept your resignation in the usual manner. You will be good enough to hand me his photograph, in order that it may be added to our collection in the Chamber of Horrors.

IRENE (*who has meanwhile taken it from her purse*). It's right here. (*Gives it to PRESIDENT.*) There, ma'am. (*Sits down.*)

(PRESIDENT examines it through an enormous magnifying-glass, writes the date on the back, and enters the transaction in a ledger. The others whisper together. MISS GOADSBY shows signs of agitation and is soothed by her friend, MRS. RICKERBY.)

PRESIDENT (*after a pause*). I should be glad to receive the views and experiences of other ladies.

MISS GOADSBY (*rises, giggling and simpering*). May I borrow your smelling-salts, madam?

PRESIDENT. Certainly. Amelia (*to servant*), the smelling-salts to Miss Goadsby.

AMELIA. Yes, ma'am. (*Takes salts to MISS GOADSBY.*)

MISS GOADSBY (*taking salts*). Thank you. Forgive my girlish agitation—I'm a little overcome and confused.

(AMELIA returns to her former position.)

PRESIDENT. Perhaps you'd better sit down.

MISS GOADSBY. No, no. (*Simpering and smelling salts.*) Really, you know, I'm afraid I've been a sad flirt.

PRESIDENT. Within recent years?

MISS GOADSBY (*giggles*). Oh! yes—it was very naughty of me, wasn't it?

PRESIDENT (*sternly*). With whom did you flirt?

IRENE (*aside*). With Noah, I guess.

MISS GOADSBY. With all sorts of people.

PRESIDENT. Miss Goadsby, as a member of this Club, you must be surely aware that such an act was entirely indefensible?

MISS GOADSBY. I know, I know. I've been a giddy, giddy—

IRENE (*aside*). Goat.

MISS GOADSBY. —giddy little thing, and so I'm going to resign.

PRESIDENT (*reproachfully*). You, too, madam?

MISS GOADSBY. Yes. (*Simpering.*) I'm going to be married.

PRESIDENT. May I ask if the individual is bald?

MISS GOADSBY. His hair's a little thin. Here's his portrait. (*Hands portrait, returns to her seat, and smells salts.*)

(The PRESIDENT goes through the same business as before, this time displaying some emotion.)

PRESIDENT (*to servant*). Amelia, fetch me the smelling-salts.

AMELIA. Yes, ma'am. (*Takes salts from MISS GOADSBY and gives them to the PRESIDENT, and returns to her position R. of table.*)

PRESIDENT. Dear me! This is very remarkable, very remarkable indeed! (*Smells salts.*) To you, Miss Goadsby, I have nothing to say. You are presumably of an age to know your own mind. (*Smells salts.* MISS GOADSBY tosses her head.) I should be interested to hear any further communication that members may have to make.

MISS GOADSBY (*to MRS. RICKERBY*). Ethelberta—you!

MRS. RICKERBY. No, no.

IRENE (*to DOLLY*). You.

DOLLY. No, no.

LADY BETTY. Yes, Dolly.

MAISIE. Dolly, you must.

DOLLY. Must I stand up?

PRESIDENT (*sternly*). Certainly, madam.

DOLLY (*rising wearily*). I'm awfully tired and rattled.

PRESIDENT. I trust that you, at least, remain staunch to the cause.

DOLLY. I'm afraid I shall be a disappointment to you, madam.

PRESIDENT (*gasping*). Don't tell me that you, too, are contemplating matrimony?

DOLLY. I regret to say that I've gone so far as to consider the colour of my going-away dress.

PRESIDENT. This is amazing. There must be something infectious in the air of Chatham Street. It is obvious that microbes are actively at work. I shall complain to the proper authorities.

DOLLY (*taking photo out of purse*). When you see his portrait, I feel sure you'll agree that microbes had nothing to do with it.

PRESIDENT. Pray show it to me.

(DOLLY hands it and resumes her seat. PRESIDENT repeats the same business, but with increased agitation.)

DOLLY (*to MAISIE*). You're next.

MAISIE. No, no. Betty—you.

(LADY BETTY and MAISIE rise and move down stage disputing.)

LADY BETTY. No, no, I—

MAISIE. Do, there's a dear.

LADY BETTY. I can't.

MAISIE. You might as well.

MRS. RICKERBY (*rising and joining them*). Excuse me, couldn't we all speak at once?

MAISIE. Oh, yes; that will be splendid.

LADY BETTY. Come along, then—now, altogether.

(They return and stand in a line in front of the PRESIDENT's table, their backs to the audience. The PRESIDENT rises

and, by gestures, vainly strives to stem the torrent of words. All three speak simultaneously and very quickly, so that nothing can be clearly heard.)

LADY BETTY. I very much regret to have to tell you—

MRS. RICKERBY. I'm extremely sorry to have to inform you—

MAISIE. I'm grieved to have to break the news—

LADY BETTY. I thought I didn't want to get married—

MRS. RICKERBY. It was silly of me, because, of course, I did—

MAISIE. Of course, I really wanted to get married all the time—

LADY BETTY. He's awfully nice, and has lovely eyes—

MRS. RICKERBY. He has a beautiful moustache, and such a sweet smile—

MAISIE. He's a duck, a darling, and an absolute dear—

PRESIDENT (*at last making herself heard*). Ladies, ladies, pray return to your places. (*They resume their seats.*) I beg you to observe the rules that govern our monthly meetings. This Club being a ladies' club, it is distinctly laid down that not more than one member shall speak at once. The regulation was framed by a married solicitor with nine daughters and a florid wife, and he considered the rule vital and imperative. Ladies, since I caught the word "moustache," coupled with several endearing and quite unnecessary epithets, I am forced to the dreadful conclusion that you are all suffering from a species of connubial influenza.

LADY BETTY

MRS. RICKERBY } (*together*). We are.

MAISIE

PRESIDENT. Be good enough to give me his photograph. (*They do so in turns.*) Thank you.

(The LADIES then all talk together in whispers. MISS

GOADSBY giggles shrilly, and fans MRS. RICKERBY with her handkerchief. The PRESIDENT examines the photos and displays extraordinary emotion, smells her salts, pours out a little water, drinks it, wipes her eyes, coughs, and then rises with deep solemnity.)

Ladies, this afternoon is, and ever will be, memorable in the annals of this Club. It is, so to speak, at once my Austerlitz and my Moscow—a triumph and a defeat. You have, alas! yielded to the blandishments of the Monster Man, who for a brief moment triumphs. But, ladies, believe me—and I speak with absolute certainty—a few seconds hence you will not only change your views and withdraw your resignations, but you will be as sincerely devoted to the cause as I am myself. (General titters and murmurs of dissent.) I must ask you, ladies, to prepare for somewhat of a shock. It is my painful duty to strike a blow that may well cause you pain. But I am nerved to the task like a skilful surgeon who, knowing that his patient's life is endangered, does not hesitate to use the dreadful knife. (Murmurs of wonder and interest.) Ladies, I deeply regret to inform you that you have been the victims of a very base and vile conspiracy. Man has never been so monstrous in my eyes as he is at the present moment, never before so cruel, never so heartless, never so unprincipled. (Taking up the six photographs.) Ladies, I hold here in my hand the portraits you have given me—six in all, six pictures of one and the same person. Ladies, the same man has proposed to you all!!

ALL (rising incredulously). No, no, no; not true—impossible.

PRESIDENT. It is too true. He is base, and he is bald. Ladies, look for yourselves. (Throws photos on table.)

(The LADIES rush forward in a mass, snatch the photos and bring them down stage examining them, and all talking at once. After awhile there is silence. The PRESIDENT beckons AMELIA, gives her some directions, and AMELIA exits L. 2 E.)

DOLLY (tearing photo in half). Of course, I never cared about him really.

MAISIE (tearing photo in bits). I think he's perfectly hateful. I loathe him. (Bursts into tears.)

MISS GOADSBY. I distrusted him from the first.

MRS. RICKERBY. I'll never believe in a bald man again.

IRENE. He smoked cheap cigarettes! I might have known it.

LADY BETTY. What a cad he must be!

(Re-enter AMELIA with letter, L. 2 E.; she crosses and hands it to PRESIDENT. The LADIES talk in an excited group. AMELIA then exits L. 2 E.)

MISS GOADSBY. I was only playing with him. We all were—weren't we?

ALL. Of course.

MISS GOADSBY. We didn't mean anything—did we?

ALL. No, no.

PRESIDENT (after glancing through letter). Ladies, I have just received an important communication. MEMBERS group themselves expectantly.) This letter which has reached me is from the monster in human shape whose villainy I have just unmasked. For cold-blooded cynicism, I should describe it as unequalled in the annals of crime. I will read it—

“MADAM,

I am by profession a humorist—that is to say, I write shilling books with comic covers. I am retained to write facetiously about the weather in the columns of the 'Daily Oracle.' I do funny notices of plays, with side-splitting references to Shakespeare and Bacon. Perhaps my greatest achievement was the invention of the word 'Fiscalitis.' Having thus introduced myself, the rest is easy. I had heard of your Club and of your determination to do without us. I decided to break you up and teach you a lesson. I have done both. Good-bye. Love to all my sweethearts.

Yours, etc.,

HARRY PETTIFER.”

(There is a general shriek of rage. MRS. RICKERBY has hysterics; MISS GOADSBY faints; IRENE throws the photo on the floor and jumps on it; MAISIE cries; DOLLY buries her head in the sofa cushions; and LADY BETTY wrings her hands. Enter AMELIA, L. 2 E., with telegram, which she hands to PRESIDENT, and then exits L. 2 E. The LADIES all talk together while the PRESIDENT reads it.)

IRENE. I guess I'd like to shoot that man.

MAISIE (sobbing). The b-r-ute.

MISS GOADSBY (recovering). Oh! If I could only get at him!

MRS. RICKERBY. To deceive young girls like us!

LADY BETTY. The mean wretch.

DOLLY. I shall never get over it—never.

PRESIDENT (rising). Ladies, pray, silence. I have received this telegram from the abandoned person called Harry Pettifer. It contains an offer which you will, of course, reject with scorn. Still, it shows the man has some human feeling and I will consequently read it. It runs thus—

“Feel that I have carried joke too far. Am prepared to marry one of the ladies I proposed to. Would do more, but polygamy isn't considered respectable in this country.

PETTIFER.”

MISS GOADSBY (comes down—aside). Ah! I knew he loved me.

MRS. RICKERBY (comes down—aside). I felt that he'd be true to me.

DOLLY (comes down—aside). His constancy to me is touching.

MAISIE (comes down—aside). His heart is mine.

LADY BETTY (comes down—aside). So he loves me, after all.

IRENE (comes down—aside). It's a business proposal, and I accept it.

(All this is taken very quickly. The Characters move down in different directions, and speak almost simultaneously.)

MISS GOADSBY (turning, triumphantly). I shall marry him!

ALL (enraged). What!

MRS. RICKERBY. You will do no such thing.

MISS GOADSBY. I will.

MRS. RICKERBY. You won't.

MISS GOADSBY. How dare you, Mrs. Rickerby—

MRS. RICKERBY. —to inveigle an innocent boy into a proposal!

MISS GOADSBY (enraged). Oh! If I weren't a lady I'd tear your false front off.

MRS. RICKERBY (goaded). Nothing but my perfect manners prevents me from saying what I think of you.

MISS GOADSBY. Virago!

MRS. RICKERBY. Hussy!

(They retire wrangling.)

DOLLY (to the others). You must see perfectly clearly that I'm the only girl he ever loved.

IRENE. Nonsense.

DOLLY (sharply). Don't be rude, Irene.

IRENE. I'm not.

DOLLY. You are.

IRENE. I'm not.

DOLLY. I hate you!

IRENE. Cat!

DOLLY. Spiteful thing!

(They retire wrangling.)

MAISIE (sobbing to LADY BETTY). I'm so wretched! You will give him up, won't you, dear?

LADY BETTY. You mustn't ask me to do that.

MAISIE. Oh, do, darling. (Suddenly.) No. I tell you what. We'll toss up for him.

LADY BETTY. But I don't know how to spin a coin.

MAISIE. I'll show you; come along.

(They retire, making ineffectual attempts to spin a sixpence.)

(The other four now return and group together C., still talking at the top of their voices, and are then joined by LADY BETTY and MAISIE. They all speak together, and use such expressions as: "foolish," "absurd," "ridiculous," "nonsense," "never agree to it," "How dare you!" "He's mine," "I mean to keep him," etc.)

(The PRESIDENT, who has been occupied with her books and her smelling-salts, with intervals of amazed regret at the turmoil, now rises.)

PRESIDENT. Ladies, I observe with pained regret that you do not reject this impudent offer with the unanimity that I had anticipated.

ALL. No, no, no.

PRESIDENT. It is obvious, ladies, that you cannot all accept him.

ALL. Yes—no—yes—no.

PRESIDENT. It appears, my unhappy sisters, that you cannot arrive at a decision.

ALL. No, no, no.

PRESIDENT (leaving her table, coming down L.C., the members giving way and grouping to right of her). Yet you are apparently resolved, despite my earnest entreaty, to favour the monster's suit.

ALL. Yes, yes, yes.

PRESIDENT. The difficulty of selection is extreme and embarrassing. Still, as your President, I feel that that duty falls naturally on me, and I accept the responsibility. I will, myself, select the lady I consider the most fitting bride for this misguided humorist. Has that your approval?

ALL (enthusiastically). Yes, yes, yes.

PRESIDENT. Very well. Ladies, my choice is quickly made. (Pause.) I shall marry him myself! (Moves to L. 2 E.)

(There is a general scream of rage and indignation. A MEMBER nearest to the PRESIDENT grasps her skirt to try to restrain her, another L. the first MEMBER's skirt in a similar manner. As the curtain falls the characters are holding other's skirts, and forming a straight line R. to the L. 2 E.)

CURTAIN.

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